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BUSHIDO

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Introduction

1
Bushido as an Ethical System

CHIVALRY IS A FLOWER just as indigenous to Japan as its emblem, the cherry blossom; it is not a dried-up specimen, like some antique virtue preserved in a museum to our history. It is still a living object of power and beauty among us; and if it can't be physically seen, it still scents the moral atmosphere, and makes us aware that we are still under its potent spell. The conditions of society that brought it forth and nourished it have long disappeared; but just as far-off stars still continue to shed their rays upon us, so the light of chivalry, which

was a child of feudalism, still illumnates our moral path.

About the time that our feudalism was in its last days, Karl Marx, writing his *Capital,* called the attention of his readers to the advantage of studying the social and political institutions of feudalism in Japan, which he considered the only living form of it left in the world. I would likewise invite the Western historical and ethical student to the study of chivalry in present-day Japan.

The Japanese word which I have roughly rendered *chivalry*, is, in the original, more expressive than *horsemanship. Bu-shi-do* means literally *military-knight-ways*—the ways that fighting nobles should observe in their daily life as well and in their work—in a word, the "Precepts of Knighthood." The use of the original term is also advisable for the reason that the teaching is so unique, resulting in a cast of mind and character so peculiar, so local to Japan, that some words have a resonance so expressive of national characteristics that the best of translators can do them little justice.

2
Sources of Bushido

IN JAPAN THERE were several sources of Bushido; perhaps I may begin with Buddhism. It furnished a sense of calm trust in Fate, a quiet submission to the inevitable, a stoic composure in the face of danger, a disdain of life, and friendliness with death. A foremost teacher of swordsmanship, when he saw his pupil master his art, told him, "Beyond this point my instruction must give way to Zen teaching." *Zen* is the Japanese equivalent for *Dhyana*, which "represents human effort to reach through meditation zones of thought beyond the range of verbal

expression."* Its method is contemplation, convinced of a principle that underlies all phenomena, and putting oneself in harmony with the Absolute. Whoever attains to the perception of the Absolute raises himself above mundane things and awakes, "to a new Heaven and a new Earth."

What Buddhism failed to give, Shintoism offered in abundance. Such loyalty to the sovereign, reverence for ancestral memory, and respect for parents are not taught by any other creed. It helps impart passivity to the otherwise arrogant character of the samurai. Shinto theology has no place

for the dogma of "original sin." On the contrary, it believes in the innate goodness and God-like purity of the human soul. Shinto shrines are conspicuously lacking in objects and instruments of worship, and a plain mirror hung in the sanctuary forms the essential part of its furnishing. The presence of the mirror is easy to explain: it typifies the human heart, which, when perfectly placid and clear, reflects the image of the Deity. When you stand, therefore, in front of the shrine to worship, you see your own image reflected on its shining surface, and the act of worship is close to the old

Delphic injunction, “Know Thyself.”

* Lafcadio Hearn, *Exotics and Retrospectives* (1898).

But self-knowledge does not imply, either in the Greek or Japanese teaching, knowledge of the physical part of man, not his anatomy or his psycho-physics; knowledge was to be of a moral kind, the introspection of our moral nature.

3
Rectitude or Justice

NOTHING IS MORE loathsome to the samurai than underhanded dealings and crooked undertakings. In times when cunning could pass for military tact and downright falsehood for a strategy of war, this manly virtue, frank and honest, was a jewel that shone the brightest. Rectitude, by which I mean the quality of being honest and morally correct, is a twin brother to valor, another martial virtue. But before speaking of valor, let me linger on something that is connected to rectitude, but something which became more and more removed

from it, until its meaning was perverted. I am speaking of *gi-ri*, literally "right reason," but which came to mean the vague sense of duty that the public expect an incumbent in some position to fulfil. In its original sense, it meant duty, pure and simple—so, we speak of the *giri* we owe to parents, to superiors, to inferiors, to society at large, etc. In these instances *giri* is duty; for what else is duty than what right reason demands and commands us to do? Shouldn't Right Reason be our categorical imperative? The unconditional moral law that applies to us all?

I dare say its etymology was derived from the fact that in our conduct, say, to our parents, though love should be the only motive, we sometimes lack it. Therefore some other authority to enforce filial piety was needed and they formulated this authority in *giri*. Very rightly so, because if love does not rush to deeds of virtue, recourse must be had to man's intellect, and his reason must be quickened to convince him of the necessity of acting rightly. The same is true of any other moral obligation. When duty becomes onerous, right reason steps in to prevent our shirking it. *Giri* thus understood is

a severe taskmaster, with a birch rod in his hand to make sluggards perform their part. It is a secondary power in ethics; as a motive it is infinitely inferior to the doctrine of love, which should be the law.

I consider it a product of the conditions of a distorted society—of a society in which accidents of birth and nepotism resulted in undeserved riches and class distinctions, in which the family was the social unit, in which seniority of age was of more importance than superiority of talent, in which natural tendencies were often suppressed by arbitrary manmade customs. Because of this artificiality, *giri* in time degenerated into a vague sense of propriety, of some proper behavior used to sanction this odd habit, or that useless custom. As, for example, why a daughter must sell herself to pay for her father's

drunken laziness.

4
Courage, the Spirit of Daring and Bearing

PERHAPS KEY AMONG these other aspects I mention is a sense of **courage, the spirit of daring and bearing.** Courage was not considered worthy to be counted among virtues, unless it was exercised in the cause of righteousness. In his book of selected sayings, *Analects*, from around the 3rd century BCE, Confucius defines courage by explaining, as he often did in his teachings, what it is not: "Perceiving what is right," he says, "and doing it not, argues lack of courage." If we put this into a positive statement, it might be something like: "Courage is doing what is

right." To run all kinds of hazards, to jeopardize one's self, to rush into the jaws of death—these are often, in a stereotypical way, identified with valor. In crude fighters such rashness of conduct, what Shakespeare called "valor misbegot," is unjustly valued and admired. But this is not the case for the general rules of Knighthood. Among the samurai, death for a cause unworthy of dying for was called a "dog's death." The Prince of Mito* noted that: "To rush into the thick of battle and to be slain in it, is easy enough, anyone is equal to the task; but, it is true courage to live when it is right to live, and

to die only when it is right to die."
And yet the Prince had not even heard of the name
of Plato, who defines courage as: "the knowledge of things that a man should fear and that he should not fear." A distinction which is made in the West between moral and physical courage is also recognized among the Japanese. Valor, fortitude, bravery, fearlessness, and courage—being the qualities of
soul which appeal most easily to young minds and which can be trained by exercise and example—were the most popular virtues among the young.

* Mito Mitsukuni (1628–1700). His proper name was Tokugawa Mitsukuni, the third son of

Tokugawa Yorifusa.

There is the story of the courage in adversity of the famished little boy-prince of Sendai, who says to his little page: “Those tiny sparrows in the nest, how their yellow bills are opened wide, and now see! There comes their mother with worms to feed them. How eagerly and happily the little ones eat! But for a samurai, when his stomach is empty, it is a disgrace to feel hunger.”

5
Benevolence, the Feeling of Distress

WHEN VALOR REACHES this height, it's close to **benevolence** or **the feeling of distress,** love, magnanimity, affection for others, sympathy and pity . . . these are recognized to be the supreme virtues of the human soul. Benevolence was thought to be a virtue fit for princes. Confucius and Mencius often repeated that the highest requirement of a ruler was benevolence, by which I mean the quality of being well meaning; and of kindness. Confucius would say: "Let but a prince cultivate virtue, people will flock to him; with people will come to

him lands; lands will bring forth for him wealth; wealth will give him the benefit of right uses. Virtue is the root, and wealth an outcome." And Mencius said: "Instances are on record where individuals attained to supreme power in a single state, without benevolence, but never have I heard of a whole empire falling into the hands of one who lacked this virtue." He added to this: "It is impossible that anyone should become ruler of the people to whom they have not yielded the subjection of their hearts."

Under feudalism, which could easily be perverted into militarism, it

was due to this kindness and good will in rulers that we owed our deliver-
ance from tyranny of the worst kind. The utter surrender of “life and limb”
on the part of the governed at that time would have left nothing to hold back the rulers but their own self-will. And from this state we saw the growth of that absolutism! Far be it from me to uphold dictatorship of any sort; but it is a mistake to identify feudalism too closely with it. *

* Quotations by the Chinese philosophers Confucius (551?–479? BCE)

and Mencius (372–289 BCE)

in The Great Learning (Daxue) 10.6–7 and 10.21.

By a strange coincidence, in the backwoods of northwestern Japan, Yozan of
Yonezawa made exactly the same declaration, showing that feudalism was not all tyranny and oppression. A feudal prince, although not directly aware of owing reciprocal obligations to the people in his domain, felt a higher sense of responsibility to his ancestors and to Heaven. He was a father to his subjects, whom Heaven entrusted to his care. In a sense not usually assigned to the term, Bushido accepted and confirmed paternal government.

6
Politeness

POLITENESS, that courtesy of manners that has been noticed by every foreign tourist as a marked Japanese trait. Still, politeness is a poor virtue if it is motivated only by a fear of offending good taste. It should be the outward manifestation of a sympathetic regard for the feelings of others.

So, in its highest form, politeness almost approaches love.

Propriety, by which I mean the details or rules of behavior convention considered to be correct, became elevated to the sine qua non, the abso-

lute necessity, of social life. Therefore, it is not surprising that an elaborate system of etiquette came into vogue to train youth into correct social behavior. How one must bow, how one must walk and sit, were taught and learned with utmost care. Table manners grew to be a science. Tea serving and drinking were raised to a ceremony. A man of education is, of course, expected to be master of all these.

I have heard slighting remarks made by Europeans about our elaborate code of politeness. It has been criticized as absorbing too much of our thought and silly to observe such strict

obedience to it. I admit that there may be unnecessary niceties in our etiquette, but whether it is as foolish as being slaves to ever-changing fashions, is a question not very clear to me.

However, I do not consider the fashionable solely as freaks of vanity; on the contrary, I look upon this as a ceaseless search for the beautiful. I also do not think elaborate ceremony is altogether trivial; for it indicates the result of a long process of observation as to the most appropriate method of achieving a certain result. If there is anything to do, there is certainly a best way to do it, and the best way is both the most economical and therefore the most graceful. The tea ceremony presents certain definite ways of moving a bowl, a spoon, a napkin, etc. To a novice it looks tedious. But you soon dis-

cover that the way is, after all, the most time saving; in other words, the most economical use of force, the most graceful.

7
Veracity and Sincerity

TO THE QUESTION, "Which is the more important, to tell the truth or to be polite?" the Japanese are said to give an answer directly opposite to what the Americans will say—but first let's look at **veracity**, without which politeness is a farce and a show. "Propriety carried beyond right bounds," says Masamune,* "becomes a lie." An ancient poet, Sugawara no Michizane† (845–903), gives this advice: "To thyself be faithful: if in thy heart thou strayest not from truth, without prayer of thine the Gods will keep thee whole." The highest point in the

development of sincerity, to which Confucius gives expression in the Doctrine of the Mean, attributes to sincerity transcendental powers, almost identifying them with the Divine. "Sincerity is the end and the beginning of all things; without sincerity there would be nothing." He then dwells with eloquence on the far-reaching and long enduring nature of sincerity, its power to produce changes without movement and by its mere presence to accomplish its purpose without effort. The Chinese ideogram for *sincerity* is a combination of *word* and *perfect*.

Lying or the use of ambiguous terms in order to mislead were deemed equally cowardly. The bushi held that his high social position demanded a loftier standard of truthfulness than that of the tradesman and peasant. *Bushi no ichi-gon*—the word of a samurai was a sufficient guarantee of the truthfulness of a statement. His word carried such weight that promises were generally made and fulfilled without a written pledge, which would have been deemed quite beneath his dignity. Many thrilling anecdotes were told of those who atoned by death for *ni-gon*, speaking in a "double tongue."

The regard for veracity was so high that, unlike the Christians who persistently violate the commands of the Teacher not to swear, the best of samurai looked upon the demand to make an oath as an insult to their honor.

* Date Masamune (1567–1636), the founding daimyo of the Sendai domain.

† Sugawara no Michizane (845–903), an early Heian-period aristocrat and scholar, exiled to Kyushu.

An American writer, Dr. Peery,* is responsible for expressing the view that if you ask an ordinary Japanese person which is better, to tell a falsehood or be impolite, he will not hesitate to answer "to tell a falsehood!" Dr. Peery is partly right and partly wrong; right in that an ordinary Japanese person, even a samurai, may answer in this way, but wrong in attributing too much weight to the term he translates as "falsehood." This word (in Japanese, *uso*) is used to indicate anything which is not a truth (*makoto*) or fact (*honto*). Lowell† tells us that Wordsworth could not distinguish between truth and

fact, and an ordinary Japanese person is in this respect like Wordsworth.

Ask a Japanese person, or an American or a British person of any refinement, to tell you whether he dislikes you or whether he is sick to his stomach of you, and he will not hesitate long to tell little white lies and answer, "I like you," or, "I am quite well, thank you." To sacrifice truth merely for the sake of politeness was regarded as "empty form" (*kyo-rei*) and "deception by sweet words," and was never justified.

* Rufus Benton Peery (1868–1934), a Lutheran missionary in Kyushu, who published *The Gist of Japan: The Islands, Their People, and Missions* in 1897.

† James Russell Lowell (1819–1891) was an American poet, critic, and

editor.

8
Honor

OFTEN HAVE I wondered whether the truthfulness of Bushido had any motive higher than courage. With no specific commandment against bearing false witness, lying was not condemned as sin, but simply as weakness, and, as such, highly dishonorable. As a matter of fact, the idea of honesty is so intimately blended, and its Latin and its German etymology so identified with **honor**, that it is about time that I should consider this feature of the samurai.

The sense of honor, implying a vivid awareness of personal dignity and

worth, characterizes the samurai, born and bred to value the duties and privileges of their profession. Though the word ordinarily given nowadays as the translation of honor was not used freely, the idea was conveyed by such Japanese terms as *na* (name) *men-moku* (face, dignity), and *kuai-bun* (scandal, gossip), reminding us respectively of the biblical use of "name," of the evolution of the term *personality* from the Greek mask, and of *fame*. A good name—one's reputation, the immortal part of one's self—was of considerable importance, so any attack upon

its integrity was felt as a shame.
The sense of shame (*ren-chi-shin*) was one of the earliest to be focused on in juvenile education. "You will be laughed at," "It will disgrace you," "Aren't you ashamed?" were often to appeal for good behavior in a youthful thug or delinquent.

Such a recourse to his honor touched the most sensitive spot in the child's heart, as though it had been nursed on honor while it was in its mother's womb. Indeed, a sense of shame seems to me to be the earliest indication of moral consciousness. The first and worst punishment to human-

ity in consequence of tasting “the fruit of that forbidden tree” was, to my mind, not the sorrow of childbirth, nor the thorns and thistles, but the awakening of the sense of shame.

All the sartorial ingenuity of mankind has not yet succeeded in sewing an apron that will successfully hide our sense of shame. That samurai was quite right who refused to compromise his character by a slight humiliation in his youth, "because," he said, "dishonor is like a scar on a tree, which time, instead of effacing, only helps to enlarge."*

Mencius had taught centuries before, in almost the identical phrase, what Carlyle later expressed: "Shame is the soil of all Virtue, of good manners and good morals." The fear of disgrace was so great that it hung like Damocles's sword over the head of every samurai and often assumed a mor-bid

character. In the name of honor, deeds were carried out for which there is no justification in the code of Bushido. At the slightest insult, even quite imaginary insults, the quick-tempered took offense, resorted to the use of the sword, and many unnecessary troubles were the result, including many innocent lives lost.

* The samurai referred to here is Arai Hakuseki (1657–1725), a Confucian scholar who supported the shogunate.

9
The Duty of Loyalty

THE **DUTY OF LOYALTY** was the keystone making feudal virtues a neat symmetrical arch. Other virtues seen in feudalism were also common to various systems of ethics, but this virtue—homage and fealty to a superior—is a distinctive feature of feudalism. I am aware that personal loyalty is a glue existing among all sorts of men, but it is only in the code of chivalrous honor that loyalty assumes the greatest importance.

Hegel's* criticism of this is that the loyalty of feudal vassals, being an obligation to an individual and not to a

commonwealth of people in general, is a bond established on totally unjust principles. In America where "everybody is as good as anybody else," such exalted ideas of loyalty to a sovereign may be thought "excellent within certain bounds," but preposterous if taken too far. Loyalty as we conceive it in Japan may find few admirers elsewhere, not because our conception is wrong, but because it is forgotten, and because we carry it to a degree not reached in any other country. Griffis† was quite right in stating that, whereas in China Confucian ethics made obedience to parents the primary human duty,

in Japan precedence was given
to loyalty.

* Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel, *Philosophy of History* (1821).

† William Elliot Griffis (1843–1928) an author and Congregationalist minister living in Japan from

1870 to 1874. From his *Religions of Japan* (1895).

A story is told of one of the purest characters in our history, Michizane,* who, falling victim to jealousy, is exiled from the capital. Not content with this, his unrelenting enemies are now determined to kill everyone in his family. A search for his young son reveals that he is being hidden in a village school kept by Genzo, a former vassal of Michizane. When orders are dispatched to the schoolmaster to deliver the head of the young boy on a certain day, his first idea is to find a suitable substitute. He ponders over his school list, scrutinizes with careful eyes all the boys as they stroll into the

classroom, but none of them looks anything like Michizane's son. His despair, however, is only momentary; just then a new scholar is introduced—a handsome boy of the same age as his master's son, escorted by a noble mother. The boy and the mother themselves also knew of the resemblance. In the privacy of their home, both had already bent down upon the altar and decided what they should do. Without knowing this, the teacher made a suggestion of sacrifice.

* Sugawara no Michizane (845–903).

10
Education and Training of a Samurai

WITH THE PURPOSE of life being regarded as a means to serve a master, and honor being an ideal, the whole **education and training of a samurai** were conducted accordingly. The first point to observe in knightly education was to build up character, leaving in the shade the subtler skills of prudence, intelligence, and logical argument. We have seen the important parts that taste and aesthetics played in his education. Indispensable as they were to a man of culture, they were accessories rather than essentials of samurai training. Intellectual

superiority was, of course, valued; but the word *chi*, which was employed to mean the intellectual, mainly meant wisdom rather than knowledge. The tripod that supported the framework of Bushido was said to be *chi, jin, yu* —respectively wisdom, benevolence, and courage. A samurai was essentially a man of action. Science was not within his range of activity. But he took advantage of it if it benefited his profession of arms. Religion and theology were relegated to the priests; he concerned himself with them only if they helped feed his courage.

Philosophy and literature formed the

main parts of his intellectual training; but even in these, it was not objective truth that he was seeking—literature was pursued mainly as a pastime, and philosophy as a practical aid in the formation of character, or for the exposition of some military or political problem. From what has been said, it will not be surprising to note that the curriculum of studies in Bushido consisted mainly of fencing, archery, jujutsu or yawara, horsemanship, the use of the spear, tactics, calligraphy, ethics, literature, and history.

Of these, jujutsu and calligraphy may require a few words of explanation. Emphasis was put on good writing, probably because our logograms, with their connection to pictures, possess artistic value, and also because penmanship was seen as indicating the quality of one's personal character.

Jujutsu may be defined as an application of anatomical knowledge of the body to the purpose of offense or defense. It differs from wrestling in that it does not depend upon muscular strength. It differs from other forms of attack in that it uses no weapon. It requires grabbing or striking the enemy's

body in order to make him numb and incapable of resistance. Its object is not to kill, but to incapacitate for the time being.

A subject of study that one would expect to find in military education, which is conspicuous by its absence in Bushido, is mathematics. This, however, can be easily explained in part by the fact that feudal warfare was not carried out with scientific precision. Not only that, but the whole training of the samurai was unfavorable to fostering numerical notions.

11
Self-Control

ON THE ONE HAND, samurai had the discipline of enduring without a groan and, on the other, the teaching of politeness. This requires us not to spoil the pleasure or serenity of another by showing our own sorrow or pain. These practices combined to encourage a stoical turn of mind. Stoicism then became the characteristic of a whole nation. Although our national manners and customs may seem hard-hearted to a foreign observer, still we Japanese are really as susceptible to tender emotion as anyone under the sky.

In a way, I think that we feel more than others, since the very attempt to restrain our natural desire to express ourselves causes suffering. Imagine boys and girls brought up to not shed of a tear or utter a groan to relieve their feelings. And there is a physiological question whether such effort steels their nerves . . . or makes them more sensitive!

It was considered unmanly for a samurai to betray his emotions on his face. “He shows no sign of joy or anger,” was a phrase used in describing a strong character. The most natural of feelings were kept under control. A

father could hug his son only at the expense of his dignity. A husband would not kiss his wife in the presence of other people.

Calmness of behavior, composure of mind, should not be disturbed by passion of any kind. I remember when, during the late war with China,* a regiment left a certain town and many people flocked to the station to bid farewell to the army. On this occasion, an American resident came along and expected to see loud demonstrations, as the nation itself was highly excited and there were fathers, mothers, and sweethearts of the soldiers in the crowd. But the American was strangely disappointed—as the whistle blew and the train began to move, the hats of thousands of people were silently

taken off and their heads bowed in reverential farewell. There was no waving of flags or handkerchiefs, no shouts and cheers, just deep silence during which only an attentive ear could catch a few broken sobs. In domestic life, too, I know of a father who spent whole nights listening to the breathing of a sick child, standing behind the door to avoid being caught in such an act of parental weakness! I know of a mother who, on her deathbed, refrained from asking for her son to come and see her, so that he would not be disturbed in his studies.

* First Sino-Japanese War, August 1894–April 1895.

12
The Institutions of Suicide and Redress

THE HEIGHT OF SELF-CONTROL is reached and best illustrated in the first of the two institutions which we shall now consider:

the institutions of suicide and redress (*hara-kiri and kataki-uchi*).

To begin with suicide, let me state that I confine my observations only to *seppuku or kappuku*, popularly known as hara-kiri, which means self-immolation by disembowelment. "Ripping the abdomen? How absurd!" So cry many who hear of it for the first time. In our minds this mode of death is associated with instances of the noblest

deeds and of most touching pathos, so that there seems nothing disgusting or ludicrous about it. So wonderful is the transforming power of virtue, of greatness, of tenderness, that the vilest form of death assumes a sublime power and becomes symbolic of new life.

In addition, seppuku does not seem absurd to us because the choice of this particular part of the body to operate upon was based on an old anatomical belief as to the seat of the soul. When Moses wrote of Joseph's "bowels yearning upon his brother," or David prayed to the Lord not to forget his bowels, or when Isaiah,

Jeremiah, and other inspired men of old spoke of the “sounding” or the “troubling” of bowels, they all spoke of the belief prevalent among the Japanese—that the soul was enshrined in the abdomen.

13
The Sword, the Soul of the Samurai

FROM ALL THIS it is easy to infer that the sword played an important part in social discipline and life. The saying passed as an axiom which called **the sword the soul of the samurai** and made it the emblem of power and prowess. When Mahomet proclaimed that: "The sword is the key of Heaven and of Hell," he echoed a Japanese sentiment. At a very early age, the samurai boy learned to use a sword. It was a momentous occasion for him when at the age of five he put on a samurai costume for the first time, placed upon a go-board* and initiated into the

rights of the military profession by having a real sword thrust into his girdle. After this first ceremony, he would never be seen outside his father's gates without this badge of his status, even if it was usually substituted in everyday wear by a gilded wooden sword. Not many years pass before he wears the genuine steel, though blunt. Then later a sharp sword, and with enjoyment keener than his newly acquired blades, he marches out to try their edge on wood and stone.

When he reaches the age of fifteen, being given independence of action, he can now pride himself upon the

possession of arms sharp enough for any work. The very possession of the dangerous instrument imparts in him a feeling and an air of self-respect and responsibility. “He beareth not his sword in vain.”† What he carries in his belt is a symbol of what he carries in his mind and heart—loyalty and honor.

* The game of go (or “Japanese checkers”), contains 361 squares representing a battlefield. The aim is to occupy as much space as possible.

† Romans 13:4

The two swords, the longer and the shorter—called, respectively, *daito* and *shoto* or *katana* and *wakizashi*—never leave his side. When at home, they grace the most conspicuous place in the study; by night they guard his pillow within easy reach of his hand. Constant companions, the swords are beloved, and names of endearment are often given to them. They are venerated, in fact almost worshiped. Many a temple and many a family in Japan has a sword as an object of adoration. Even the commonest dirk has due respect paid to it. Any insult to it is tantamount to a personal affront. Woe to

him who carelessly steps over a weapon lying on the floor!

So precious an object did not escape the notice and the skill of artists nor the vanity of its owner, especially in times of peace, when it is worn with no more use than a crosier by a bishop or a scepter by a king. Sharkskin and finest silk for hilt, silver and gold for the guard, lacquer of varied hues for the scabbard, robbed the deadliest weapon of half its terror; but these appurtenances are playthings compared with the blade itself.

14
The Training and Position of Women

Here we should focus on **the training and position of women.** Women have sometimes been called the paragon of paradoxes, because the intuitive working of their mind is beyond the comprehension of men's "arithmetical understanding." The Chinese ideogram denoting "the mysterious," "the unknowable," consists of two parts, one meaning "young" and the other "woman," because the physical charms and delicate thoughts of the fair sex are above the coarse mental nature of men.

In the Bushido ideal of woman,

however, there is little mystery and only seemingly a paradox. Ideographically, the Chinese represent *wife* by a woman holding a broom—certainly not to brandish it offensively or defensively against her partner, or for witchcraft, but for the more harmless uses.

The idea involved being as homely as the etymological derivation of the English words *wife* (weaver) and *daughter* (*duhitar*, milkmaid). The Bushido ideal of womanhood was preeminently domestic. These seeming contradictions—domesticity and Amazonian traits—are not inconsistent with the

Precepts of Knighthood.

Bushido being a teaching primarily intended for men, the virtues it prized in women were naturally far from being distinctly feminine. Bushido praised those women most "who emancipated themselves from the frailty of their sex and displayed a heroic fortitude worthy of the strongest and the bravest of men."* Young girls were trained to repress their feelings, to harden their nerves, to manipulate weapons—especially the long-handled sword called *naginata*, so as to be able to hold their own against unexpected odds. Yet the primary motive for exercises

of this martial character was not for use in the field; it was twofold—personal and domestic. A woman with no lord of her own formed her own bodyguard. With her weapon she guarded her personal sanctity with as much zeal as her husband did his master's. The domestic use of her warlike training was in the education of her sons, as we shall see later.

* William Edward Hartpole Lecky, an Irish historian and political theorist. Taken from his

A History of European Morals (1869).

Fencing and similar exercises, if rarely of practical use, were a counterbalance to the otherwise passive habits of woman. They could also be used in times of need. Girls, when they reached womanhood, were presented with dirks (*kai-ken*, pocket knives), which might be used to attack the bosom of their assailants, or, if needed, their own. The latter was very often the case. When a Japanese woman saw her chastity menaced, she did not wait for her father's dagger. Her own weapon always lay close by. It was a disgrace to her not to know the proper way in which to undertake self-

destruction. For example, she must know the exact spot to cut in her throat.
She must know how to tie her lower limbs together with a belt so that,
whatever the agonies of death might be, her corpse would be found in
utmost modesty with the limbs properly composed.

15
The Influence of Bushido

IT IS NOT SURPRISING that the virtues and teachings in the Precepts of Knighthood spread beyond the military class. As the sunrise first tips the highest peaks with russet hue and then gradually casts its rays on the valley below, so the ethical system that first enlightened the military order later drew in followers from the masses. Virtues are no less contagious than vices. "There needs but one wise man in a company, and all are wise, so rapid is the contagion," says Ralph Waldo Emerson. No social class or caste can resist the diffusive power of

moral influence.

What Japan was she owed to the samurai. They were not only the flower of the nation but its root as well. All the gracious gifts of Heaven flowed through them. Though they kept themselves socially aloof from the populace, they set a moral standard for them and guided them by their example.
I admit Bushido had its esoteric and exoteric teachings—some were for looking after the welfare and happiness of the commonalty, others were for emphasizing the practice of virtues for their own sake.

In the most chivalrous days of

Europe, knights formed only a small fraction of the population, but, as Emerson says: “In English literature, half the drama and all the novels, from Sir Philip Sidney to Sir Walter Scott, paint this figure (of the gentleman).” If we put the Edo era writers Chikamatsu and Bakin in the place of Sidney and Scott, then you have in a nutshell the main features of the literary history of Japan.

The innumerable avenues of popular amusement and instruction—the theaters, the storytellers' booths, the preacher's dais, the musical recitations, the novels—have taken stories about samurai as their chief theme. The peasants around the open fire in their huts never tire of repeating the achievements of Yoshitsune and his faithful retainer Benkei, or of the two brave Soga brothers; the dusky urchins listen with gaping mouths until the last stick burns out and the fire dies in its embers, still leaving their hearts aglow with the tale that is told. The clerks and the shop boys, after their day's work

is over and the *amado* shutters of the store are closed, gather together to relate the story of Nobunaga and Hideyoshi far into the night, until slumber overtakes their weary eyes and transports them from the drudgery of the counter. The very babe just beginning to toddle is taught the adventures of Momotaro, the daring conqueror of ogre-land. Even girls are so imbued with the love of knightly deeds and virtues that they would seriously incline to devour with greedy ear the romance of the samurai.

16
Is Bushido Still Alive?

IS BUSHIDO STILL ALIVE? Or has Western civilization, in its march through the land, already wiped out every trace of it? It would be a sad thing if a nation's soul could die so fast. It would be a poor soul that could succumb so easily to outside influences. The total psychological elements that constitute a national character are as tenacious as the "irreducible elements of species, of the fins of fish, of the beak of the bird, of the tooth of the carnivorous animal." In his book, full of shallow asseverations and brilliant generalizations, Gustave LeBon

says: “The discoveries due to the intelligence are the common patrimony of humanity; qualities or defects of character constitute the exclusive patrimony of each people: they are the firm rock which the waters must wash day by day for centuries, before they can wear away even its external asperities.”* In studying the various virtues instilled by Bushido, we have drawn upon European sources for comparison and illustrations, and we have seen that no one quality of character was exclusive to Japan. Though it is true that the total combination of moral qualities presents a quite unique aspect.

The character that Bushido stamped on our nation, and on the samurai in particular, cannot be said to form "an irreducible element of species," but nevertheless, there is no doubt as to the vitality which it retains. Were Bushido a mere physical force, the momentum it has gained in the last seven hundred years could not stop so abruptly. Were it transmitted only by heredity means, its influence must be immensely widespread.

* From The Psychology of Peoples (1898), by Gustave LeBon (1841–1931), a French social psychologist.

It was an honest confession of the race when Yoshida Shoin (1830–59), one of the most brilliant pioneers of Modern Japan, wrote on the eve of his execution the following stanza:

Full well I knew this course must end in death;
It was Yamato spirit urged me on
To dare whate'er betide.

Unformulated, Bushido was and still is the animating spirit, the motor force of our country.

Mr. Ransome says that "there are three distinct Japans in existence side by side today—the old, which has not wholly died out; the new, hardly yet

born except in spirit; and the transition, passing now through its most critical throes."* While this is very true in most respects, and particularly as regards tangible and concrete institutions, but as applied to fundamental ethical notions, this statement requires some modification. For Bushido, the maker and product of Old Japan, is still the guiding principle of the transition and will prove the formative force of the new era.

* James Stafford Ransome (1860–1931), from the introduction to his *Japan in Transition: A Comparative Study of the Progress, Policy, and Methods of the Japanese Since Their War with China (1899).*

17
The Future of Bushido

AS TO THE FUTURE OF BUSHIDO, whose days seem to be already numbered, ominous signs are in the air. Forces are at work to threaten it. Few historical comparisons can be more judiciously made than between the Chivalry of Europe and the Bushido of Japan, if history repeats itself.

The particular and local causes for the decay of Chivalry have application to Japanese conditions; but the larger and more general causes that helped to undermine Knighthood and Chivalry are surely working toward the decline of Bushido.

One remarkable difference between the experience of Europe and that of Japan is that, when Chivalry was weaned from feudalism and was adopted by the Church, it obtained a fresh lease on life. But in Japan, no religion was large enough to nourish it; and so when feudalism was gone, Bushido, left an orphan, had to fend for itself. The new military organization of modern Japan might take it under its patronage, but we know that modern warfare can afford little room for its continuous growth. Shintoism, which fostered it in its infancy, is itself rather outdated. The hoary sages of ancient China

are being supplanted by recent intellectual power.

Already, as Veblen says, "the decay of the ceremonial code—or, as it is otherwise called, the vulgarization of life—among the industrial classes proper, has become one of the chief enormities of latter-day civilization in the eyes of all persons of delicate sensibilities."* The irresistible tide of triumphant democracy is powerful enough to engulf the remnant of Bushido. The present forces in society are antagonistic to petty class spirit, and Chivalry is a class spirit. Modern society, if it pretends to any unity, cannot admit

“purely personal obligations devised in the interests of an exclusive class.”†

Add to this the progress of popular instruction, of industrial arts and habits, of wealth and city life—then we can easily see that neither the keenest cuts
of a samurai sword nor the sharpest shafts shot from Bushido’s boldest
bows can succeed.

* Thorstein Veblen, *The Theory of the Leisure Class* (1899).

† From *Norman Conquest*, vol. V, by English historian Edward Augustus Freeman (1823–1892).

The state built upon the rock of honor and fortified by the same is fast
falling into the hands of quibbling lawyers and gibbering politicians armed
with logic-chopping engines of war. The words that a great thinker used in
speaking of Theresa and Antigone may aptly be repeated of the samurai,
that "the medium in which their ardent deeds took shape is forever gone."*
So much for knightly virtues! So much for samurai pride! The morality of
Bushido is destined to fade away as "the captains and the kings depart."†

If history can teach us anything, the state built on martial virtues—

be it a city like Sparta or an empire like Rome—can never make on Earth a "continuing city."‡ Universal and natural as the fighting instinct is in man, and useful as it has proved to be in producing noble sentiments and manly virtues, it is not the only aspect of mankind. Beneath the instinct to fight there lies a more divine instinct to love.

* From the *Finale of Middlemarch* by the English novelist George Eliot (Mary Ann Evans, 1819–80).

† From an 1897 poem, "Recessional," by the British writer Rudyard Kipling (1865–1936).

‡ Hebrews 13:14.

http://bushido.jlit.net/index/html.

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